

**Remarks by Michael G. Baker,
Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and President, Ground Water Protection Council,
At the 2003 National Source Water Protection Conference**

Good morning. I have to tell you how truly exciting this is for me. All of these people, all of you, here with a single focus, to talk about protecting the source of our public drinking water. Having been personally involved in the fledgling days of wellhead protection, what, 15 years ago now, I can tell you we have come a long way. Before then there weren't this many people in the entire country even thinking about source water protection in the way we are here today.

The organizers of this conference have just done a fantastic job, this is an tremendous agenda. You are going to have the opportunity to hear a lot of great ideas over the next few days. I hope you share the enthusiasm I'm feeling and take advantage that opportunity and all the expertise we have gathered here for this meeting.

As mentioned I am the current President of the Ground Water Protection Council. For those of you not familiar with the Council, we are the national association of state underground injection control and ground water protection programs. We provide a forum for state program administrators, such as myself to get together, share ideas, and help each other to do our jobs more effectively. As my grandmother use to say **“you need to learn from others mistakes, because no one lives long enough to make all of them on their own.”** GWPC allows us to share all of our mistakes and our successes. Of course, some of us have more than others. I think I was elected president because everyone was learning so much from all my mistake.

Anyway, as an association of state ground water protection programs, and the fact that 90% of our public water systems rely on ground water as their source of drinking water, GWPC has been very active in source water protection activities. First, assisting states developing and implementing wellhead protection programs and then working on a number of source water assessment and protection initiatives.

Besides working with USEPA in developing various SWAP related guidance, GWPC as also been assisting states through several SWAP conferences and seminars; SWP is always a major emphasis of our Ground Water Division meetings. Most recently we have been working with ASDWA and USEPA to establish a meaningful way to measure the results of state source water assessment and protection efforts. As part of that effort, ASDWA and GWPC will be working with our members to pilot test the States' ability to collect and report on those measures over the next year or so. Closely related that GWPC is also working with USEPA to address the technical challenges of gathering source water data from different state agencies and databases.

[I do want to take a quick moment and acknowledge the working relationship the GWPC has with ASDWA. The members of both organizations share the recognition that we need to protect our underground sources of drinking water. We have worked together on a number of initiatives and I am sure that positive working relationship will continue under Jeff's leadership.]

The State members GWPC, and ASDWA have made a tremendous commitment to source water assessment and protection. A number of states have already completed their assessments, and all the rest are committed to getting assessments done, most by the end of this year. **I don't think we can overstate the magnitude of that accomplishment.** States have expended huge amounts of time and resources to get high quality assessment completed - we do not want that effort to go to waste.

While states are still completing assessments I know most are already working on protection efforts. Most states were implementing protection efforts through their approved Wellhead Protection Programs before the source water program was even established. We continue to build on those previous efforts and are getting real protection measures in place.

One of the more exiting parts of that, is the level of source water protection activity starting to occur at the local level. We have recognized for a long time that while there's a great deal that can be done at the state and federal level, to be truly effective, source water protection has to occur at the local level. And making that happen isn't always easy. I recall a wellhead protection pilot we were conducting in a small village in Ohio. Trying to get a better understanding of how to get local ownership in source water protection. Unfortunately, contamination was identified in one of their wells actually several months *after* we had started the project. At the first public meeting held to discuss the contamination and the resulting investigation that was going to be conducted by Ohio EPA, one of the citizens from the Village stood up and said "we didn't have this contamination problem before they started doing that 'darn' wellhead protection stuff here." As this clearly points out, there are very real challenges to informing people about the source of their drinking water, its susceptibility to contamination, and what they can do about it. But we have come a long way.

We need to build on those existing source water protection efforts as well as efforts in other water resource related programs. There are huge volumes of resources being directed at protecting surface and ground water quality through a number of programs all across this country. We need to make sure that those other water resource related programs recognize and provide priority attention to those waters being used as a source of public drinking water.

I will be moderating a session this afternoon where we will talking specifically about CWA-SDWA Integration. While this is just one of the areas where integration has to occur, I believe that integration is absolutely essential if we are going to achieve the objectives of source water protection. Source water protection, whether for surface waters or ground waters has to be incorporated into watershed initiatives. We need to have our surface waters being used as a source of drinking water designated as such and monitored to ensure they are meeting their designated use. Source water protection initiatives should be a priority for CWA Section 319 NPS funding. I could go on but we will save that for this afternoon.

I will mention the Ground Water Protection Council has been extremely active promoting CWA-SDWA integration as well as a the need to recognize ground water as a critical component of the watershed. We have to recognize the three dimensional watershed.

In closing I do want to personally thank Tracy Mehan, who you will be introduced in just a few minutes for his recognition and support of the need to integrate source water protection into all of the Office of Water Programs. I want to again thank the organizers of this conference for a great job. I want to thank all of you for being here, Take advantage of the opportunity, listen, engage and have fun!
Thanks.